United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | R3 Regional Office | 333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
FAX (505) 842-3800
V/TTY (505) 842-3292

File Code: 3420 **Date:** November 6, 2003
Route To:

Subject: Proposed Rendija Canyon Insect and Disease Prevention/Suppression Project, Espanola RD (espanolard)

To: Forest Supervisor, Santa Fe NF

This letter provides our evaluation of a proposed FY 2004 insect and disease prevention/suppression project on the Espanola RD. The Rendija Canyon project would thin approximately 100 acres of forestland adjacent to the Barranca Mesa neighborhood on the northern edge of Los Alamos. Dave Conklin of our staff met with Dave Isackson (Espanola RD) and Bill Armstrong (Santa Fe NF) on August 12 to examine the proposed project area and discuss treatment plans.

The project area is about one mile long, extending along the (mostly) north-facing slope below the subdivision. Treatment would connect two recently thinned areas, creating a larger, more continuous fuel-break on the north side of Los Alamos. The bottom of Rendija Canyon was thinned and prescribe-burned about four years ago, while County land just west of the unit (in the Guaje Pines area) was thinned this past summer.

The forest here is predominantly ponderosa pine, with roughly ten percent Douglas-fir and minor amounts of white fir and white pine. Stem densities are high, with over 500 trees per acre in many areas. Several size classes are present, contributing to potential "fuel ladders." There is a significant component of larger, mature pine, especially in the southeastern portion of the unit. Much of the area has seen little or no management activity for several decades.

Scattered dwarf mistletoe infestation in both the pine and Douglas-fir occurs throughout the project area; the disease occurs at light to moderate intensity in the northern and western parts of the unit and is light in the southeastern portion. Recent pine bark beetle activity has killed scattered individual trees and small groups in the project area and has caused more extensive mortality further down Rendija Canyon.

The proposed treatment is a low thinning, retaining 50 to 100 of the largest, most vigorous trees per acre. Within mistletoe-infested areas, the largest trees with the least amount of mistletoe would be left; non-host species such as white pine would be retained where available. Spacing would vary, creating a more irregular, clumpy stand structure. Some of the larger cut material would probably be removed from the site for firewood. It is anticipated that mastication or chipping would be used in some areas, while hand-piling and burning may be necessary on the steeper slopes.

The proposed project should effectively reduce fire hazard in this wildland-urban interface and provide for sound insect and disease management. Much of the forest around Los Alamos was destroyed in the Cerro Grande wildfire of 2000, increasing the value of the Rendija Canyon area for wildlife habitat, dispersed recreation, and aesthetics. We recommend that the thinning be implemented in late summer or fall to minimize the potential for an outbreak of engraver beetles.

/s/ David A. Conklin (for)
DEBRA ALLEN-REID
New Mexico Zone Leader,
Forest Health

cc: David W Isackson, William Armstrong, Leonard Lucero, Mailroom R3 Santa Fe